

**On the morphosyntactic acquisition of the German DP by Italian adult L2 learners:
Possessive constructions, Noun placement and inflectional morphology on nominal modifiers**

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On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

▪ **Aim of the research**
Investigate the process of L2 parameter resetting in the domain of nominal syntax

▪ **Syntactic domain investigated**
German Saxon genitive constructions; an option available in German but not in Italian

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▪ **Morphosyntactic properties of German Saxon genitive constructions**

- (i) The case affix -s attaches to bare proper names (BPN Poss henceforth) and kinship terms only
- (ii) The Saxon genitive cannot be introduced by determiners
- (iii) In the Saxon genitive construction the definiteness of the noun phrase depends on the definiteness of the possessor noun

(1)a **Ilses/Mutters rote Tasche**
Ilse-GEN/mother-GEN red bag
"Ilse's/the mother's red bag"

b ***die/eine Ilses rote Tasche**
*the/a Ilse-GEN red bag

c ***Fraus rote Tasche**
woman-GEN red bag
"the woman's red bag"

d **die rote Tasche der Frau**
"the red bag of the woman"

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▪ **Morphosyntactic properties of Italian possessive constructions containing a BPN Poss**

- (i) The BPN Poss is licensed postnominally through the preposition *di*
- (ii) The possessive construction is introduced by a determiner
- (iii) The possessive construction does not have definiteness inheritance. The definiteness of the noun phrase does not depend on the definiteness of the possessor

(2)a **La/una borsa rossa di Ilse**
the/a bag red of Ilse's

b ***la/una (di) Ilse borsa rossa**

c **la/una sua borsa rossa**

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▪ **Theoretical background**

- (i) **Split D** (Haegeman (2004), Giusti (2005), (2006) based on work by Rizzi (1997) on the clausal left periphery)
 - ☐ Multi-layered DP; the nominal D parallels the clausal C and also consists of separate functional heads;
- (ii) **More than one position available for the licensing of possessors** (Szabolcsi (1983), (1987), (1994)), De Wit (1997), Cardinaletti (1998), Longobardi (2000), Gavrouseva (2000), Haegeman (2004))
 - ☐ Possessors are merged inside the lexical layer and may target different positions within the DP;
- (iii) **NP raising analysis** (Shlonsky (2003), Cinque (2005)a and (2005)b)
 - ☐ The noun is merged inside the lexical layer and moves through the DP as a maximal projection rather than as a bare head;
- (iv) **AP's universal hierarchy** (Crisma (1993), Cinque (1994))
 - ☐ Adjectives are maximal projections merged in specifier positions of functional nodes and are hierarchically ordered according to their semantic properties

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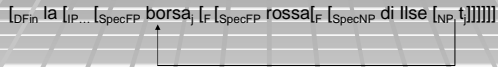
▪ **Derivation assumed for German Saxon genitive constructions**

[_{SpecDFinP} Ilses, [_{DFin} [_{SpecIP} t_i, [_{SpecFP} rote [_F [_{SpecFP} Tasche, [_F [_{SpecNP} t_i [_{NP} t_i]]]]]]]]

- (i) **BPN Poss**
Two-step movement;
(a) from the merged position SpecNP to SpecIP in order to check [+case] feature
(b) from SpecIP to SpecDFinP in order to check a [+def] feature
- (ii) **NP**
It moves from the merged position to the specifier of a low functional node projected above the lexical layer in order to check phi-features

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Derivation assumed for Italian possessive constructions containing a BPN Poss



- (i) BPN Poss
It is licensed in situ through the insertion of the preposition *di*. As a consequence, the DFin position is filled with a determiner.
- (ii) NP
It moves from the merged position to the specifier of an intermediate functional node crossing over "low" APs (i.e. adjectives of color, adjectives of nationality)

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Parameter resettings involved in the acquisition of German Saxon genitive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- (A) BPN Poss Movement Parameter
 - (i) [strong] in German > BPN Poss is raised to the DFinP layer
 - (ii) [weak] in Italian > BPN Poss is licensed in the NP lexical layer through preposition
 - (B) NP Raising Parameter
 - (i) [weak] in German > NP is not raised to an intermediate FP position
 - (ii) [strong] in Italian > NP is raised to an intermediate FP position
- ⇒ If the L2 word order is to be achieved, Italian L2 learners of German have to:
- (1) reset the feature strength responsible for NP Raising from the **strong** Italian value to the **weak** German value;
 - (2) reset the feature strength responsible for BPN Poss Movement from the **weak** Italian value to the **strong** German value

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The tasks

- (A) an **oral picture description task** (henceforth **PDT**) administered to a group of 18 Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced Italian learners of German. The same test was administered to a control group of 8 native German speakers;
- (B) a **written sentence completion task** (henceforth **SCT**) administered to a group of 14 Beginner/Intermediate Italian learners of German. The same test was administered to a control group of 10 native German speakers.

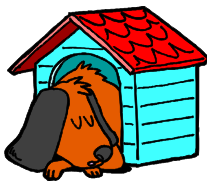
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The PDT

- **Aim of the task**
Elicit possessive constructions of the Saxon Genitive type (25 items and 40 fillers). Furthermore the task gives cues on suppliance of inflectional morphology on nominal modifiers (-s affix on BPN Poss and agreement morphology on attributive adjectives)
- **Saxon genitive constructions were investigated in two structural conditions:**
 - (i) in Simple DPs
 - (ii) in DPs containing an attributive adjectives (APs of color and APs of nationality)
- The subjects were asked to look at a drawing while listening to some information about the content of the picture and to answer a question posed by the investigator

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The PDT – example of fillers

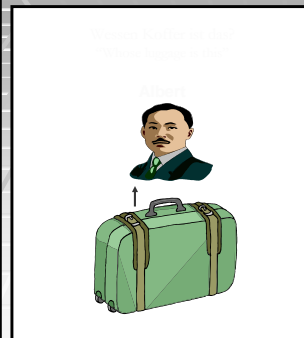


Die Lehrerin trägt eine Bluse. Die Bluse ist grün.
Was trägt die Lehrerin?
"The teacher is wearing a shirt. The shirt is green.
What is the teacher wearing?"



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The PDT – example of items



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The SCT

- Aim of the task**
Investigate the tendency to extend a property of the L1 to the Saxon genitive constructions, namely the co-occurrence determiners and pronominal possessors
- Structural conditions investigated** (35 fillers and 15 items)
(i) Saxon genitive in simple DPs
(ii) Saxon genitive in DPs containing an attributive adjectives (APs of color, APs of quality and modal APs)
- The subjects were asked to complete a total of 50 sentences using lexical/functional elements given in brackets and discarding only one of them when they deemed it necessary in order to construct a well-formed sentence. The "intruder" contained in all items were a definite article. The items were given all inflected and in German

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The SCT – example of fillers

- (3) *Brigitte* [ein; braucht; Hotelzimmer; in dem]
- (i) Expected answer:
(3)a **Brigitte braucht ein Hotelzimmer**
"Brigitte needs a hotel room"
- (ii) Example of a possible non-target answer:
(3)b ***Brigitte braucht in dem Hotelzimmer**
"Brigitte needs in the hotel room"

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The SCT – example of items

- (4) *Ich* [mit; fahre; Peters Auto; dem; nach Berlin]
- (i) Expected answer:
(4)a **Ich fahre mit Peters Auto nach Berlin**
"I go to Berlin with Peter's car"
- (ii) Example of possible non-target answer
(4)b ***Ich fahre mit dem Peters Auto nach Berlin**
"I go to Berlin with the Peter's car"

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The SCT – example of items

- (5) *Der Polizist* [Tasche; Ilses; sucht; rote; die]
- (i) Expected answer:
(5)a **Der Polizist sucht Ilses rote Tasche**
"The policeman is looking for Ilse's red bag"
- (ii) Example of a possible non-target answer:
(5)b ***Der Polizist sucht die Ilses rote Tasche**
"The policeman is looking for the Ilse's red bag"

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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

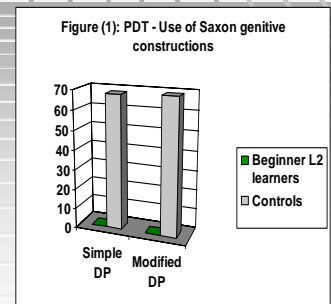
- Initial state, which reflects properties of the L1 grammar.**
- PDT – Beginners L2 learners only resort to possessive constructions available in their L1 (Van de Craats et al. (2000) for similar results).

→ **The use of a case assigner for expressing the possession prevails over Saxon genitive DPs**

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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

- (6)a Das ist das Buch von Peter
„This is the book of Peter's"
- b Das Buch gehört Peter
"The book belongs to Peter"
- c *Das Buch gehört zu Peter



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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

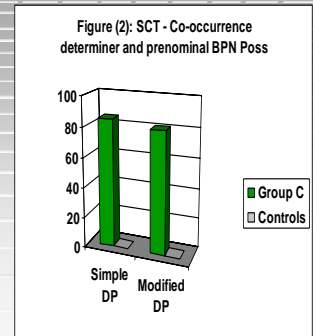
- Initial state, which reflects properties of the L1 grammar.
- SCT - L2 learners extend a property of their L1 into the L2.

L2 learners insert the definite determiner when the BPN Poss is in prenominal position (Matteini (1999), Di Domenico and Bennati (2006) for similar results)

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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

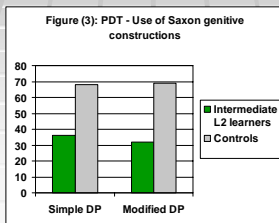
- (7)a *Die Annas Pizza
the Anna-GEN Pizza
- b *Die Ilses rote Tasche
the Ilse-GEN red bag
- c *Die schwierige Johans Frage
the difficult Johan-GEN question



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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

- Intermediate state, which is affected by:
 - PDT - a more variability as for the use of Saxon genitive constructions in Intermediate L2 learners.
- Saxon genitive constructions alternate with possessive constructions expressed through a case assigner



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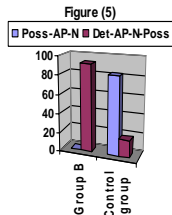
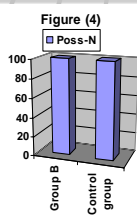
Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

- Intermediate state, which is affected by:
 - SCT - a stage of variability in word order as for the position of BPN Poss.
- BPN Poss always occurs in postnominal position within modified DPs.

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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

- (8) Die Kinder schlafen auf Erwins Bett
„The children are sleeping on Erwin's bed“
- (9) Der Polizist sucht die rote Tasche Ilse's
„The policeman is looking for the red bag of Ilse's“



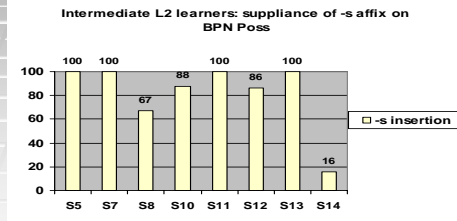
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Resetting of BPN Poss Movement Parameter

- Discrepancy between simple and modified DPs as for the position of BPN Poss is concerned
- Proposal: In the process of L2 parameter resetting, a parameter could be „partially“ set to a new value (White (1990), (1991), Hawkins (1993), Herschensohn (1998)a). L2 learners may go through a stage during which they adopt the L2 value for a give parameter only in specific contexts, but not in others.
- In the Interlanguage grammar of Group B the BPN Poss movement is restricted to simple DPs only. L2 learners master BPN Poss movement with respect to determiners but not with respect to APs

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- Only 4 out of 10 subjects omit the appropriate morphology on BPN Poss
- Only subject 14 consistently avoids -s insertion

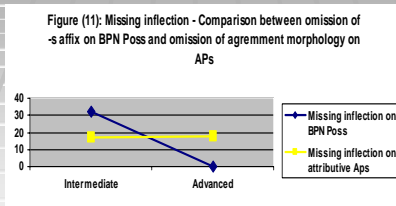


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- Suppliance of inflectional morphology on nominal modifiers**
- Proposal:** Knowledge of L2 adjectival agreement categories is available via L1 transfer in Italian L2 learners of German. The residual phenomenon of missing inflection can be interpreted in terms of a problem of mapping phi-feature agreement into their particular morphological manifestation (Lardiere (1998) a and b, Lardiere (2000), Prévost and White (2000)a and b))

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- Suppliance of inflectional morphology on nominal modifier**
- Accuracy on morphology suppliance increases considerably according to proficiency level only in case of the -s affix on BPN Poss



- Proposal:** a reason for such a dissociation may lie in an easier acquisition of invariable bound morphemes (-s affix) over variable ones (inflectional endings of the adjectival declension in German)

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- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?**
- SCT- Group C:**
Co-occurrence determiner-prenominal BPN Poss

- (12)a *Die Annas Pizza
the Anna-GEN Pizza
- b *Die Ilses rote Tasche
the Ilse-GEN red bag
- c *Die schwierige Johans Frage
the difficult Johan-GEN question

On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?**
- (i) High Old German:** the process of grammaticalization of determiner/possessor complementarity is well attested. Determinerless possessive constructions alternate with full possessive constructions
- (15)a Gotes Boto
„God’s messenger“
- b Der Gotes Boto
the God’s messenger
- (16)a Min Fater
„my father“
- b der min Fater
„the my father“

On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?**
- (17) Dhemu Gotes sune (Marzolla 1991)
the-DAT God-GEN son
„To God’s son“
- (18) In daz Ruotgises houc
in the-ACC Ruotgises hill
„in Ruotgis hill“
- (19) Duruh den Fredhantes uuigarton
through the-ACC Fredthant-GEN vineyard
„Through Fredthant’s vineyard“

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

(20) Davide's sunu (Marzolla 1991)
„David's Son“

(21) Iacobes got
„Jacob's God“

(22) Siones dother
„Sion's daughter“

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

(ii) **Hungarian** (Szabolcsi 1987, 1994): in Upper Tisza and Decebrencen dialects proper names do not take an article

(22)a János isz-ik
the Janos-NOM drink-3sg
„Jano drinks“

b *a János isz-ik

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

As possessors, proper names are preceded by a determiner:

(23)a a János kalap-ja
the Janos-NOM hat-POSS.3sg
„Jano's hat“

b * János kalap-ja

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

(iii) **Scandinavian dialects**: In Standard Swedish the definite suffixed marker does not show up in possessive constructions:

Standard Swedish (Holmberg & Sandström (1996)

(24) lärare-n-s bok
teacher-DEF-POSS book
„the teacher's book“

In some northern varieties the same construction appears with the definite marker on the noun:

Northern Swedish (Svenonius (1993)

(25) Johans bok-en
Johan-POSS book-DEF
„John's book“

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

(iii) **Scandinavian dialects**
Northern Swedish

(26) Janne-s bil-en (Holmberg & Sandström (1996))
Janne-POSS car-DEF
„Janne's car“

(27) Per-s hus-et (Delsing (2003))
Per-POSS casa-DEF
„Per's house“

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Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

- The co-occurrence determiner- (non pronominal) possessor is attested in the languages of the world.
- Italian learners of German resort to UG options during the process of resetting the BPN Poss Movement Parameter from the L1 to the L2 value.

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- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?
- SCT- Group B:

(13) Die Kinder schlafen auf Erwins Bett
„The children are sleeping on Erwin's bed“

(14) Der Polizist sucht die rote Tasche Ilse's
„The policeman is looking for the red bag of Ilse's“

- (1) The determiner occurs when BPN Poss movement does not take place
- (2) BPN Poss movement does not take place when the DP is modified by an adjective

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- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

Norwegian possessive constructions: the prenominal position of possessive pronouns precludes the presence of the determiner. When the possessive pronoun is postnominal, the noun has the suffixed definite article –a .

(28) mi bok (Vangsnes 1999)
“my book”

(29) boka mi
book-DEF my

(30) *mi boka

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- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

Norwegian possessive constructions containing an adjective: if the possessive pronoun is prenominal neither the suffixed article on the noun nor the expletive determiner may occur. If the possessive is postnominal both article do occur

(31) min gamle hest (Vangsnes 1999)
“my old horse”

(32) *min gamle hesten
my old horse-DEF

(33) *den min gamle hesten
the my old horse-DEF

(34) den gamle hesten min

On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- Do the non-target patterns represent possible UG options?

When acquiring the morphosyntactic properties of German Saxon genitive constructions, L2 learners of Group B seem to run into the Norwegian option; They insert the determiner when the BPN Poss Movement does not take place:

(35) Erwins Bett
“Erwin's bed”

(36) Die rote Tasche Ilse's
“the red bag of Ilse's”

- In the L2 interlanguage grammar this option is restricted only to possessive DPs containing an attributive APs.

On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- Analyzing the the pattern of Group B: a further speculation

[_{SpecDFinP} Ilse_s [_{DFin} [_{SpecIP} _t [_{SpecFP} rote [_{SpecFP} Tasche [_F [_{SpecNP} _t [_{NP} _t]]]]]]]]

- BPN Poss movement over APs conforms to locality condition. An AP that intervenes between the BPN Poss and its trace cannot function as antecedent for BPN Poss trace.

On the acquisition of German possessive constructions by Italian L2 learners

- Analyzing the the pattern of Group B: a further speculation

[_{SpecDFinP} die [_{IP} [_{SpecFP} rote [_{SpecFP} Tasche [_F [_{SpecFP} Ilse_s [_F [_{SpecNP} _t [_{NP} _t]]]]]]]]

- In the interlanguage grammar of L2 learners of Group B, the AP seems to act as intervener. It blocks BPN Poss movement to SpecIP.
- Rizzi (2002): RM effects are found within the same featural class but not across classes.
- Tentative proposal: in the L2 interlanguage grammar of Group B, the BPN Poss with –s affix is analysed as a “pure” modificational element rather than an argumental element (this could be due to the fact that possessive pronouns have the categorial status of adjectives in Italian). As a consequence, an attributive AP may act as potential intervener in the local relation between the BPN Poss and its trace.

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- **What does this study tell us about the process of parameter resetting in L2 acquisition?**
- L2 learners are able to change parametric values responsible for word order asymmetries between the L1 and the L2, namely the different positions of the noun and of BPN Poss in possessive constructions
- L2 learners may show different paths in dealing with a parametric variation, including the fact that a parameter could be "partially" set to a new value. As a consequence, interlanguage grammars may show mastery and non-mastery of a given parameter.
- Incompleteness of parameter resetting observed in some L2 learners of this study can be taken as evidence for the fact that interlanguage productions represent possible UG options.

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